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ABSTRACT

The development and use of Oregon's Proficiency-Based Admission Standards System (PASS) are described and results of some evaluations of the PASS system are presented. PASS is to be used for college entry in Oregon and is designed to promote the seamlessness of high school and college education by guaranteeing that students would have the knowledge and skills needed for college work. The six content areas of PASS are based on disciplinary knowledge in mathematics, science, social sciences, foreign languages, humanities and literature, and fine and performing arts. Criterion-referenced tests, common assessment tasks developed to assess cognitively complex proficiencies, and teacher verifications of classroom performance will be the basic PASS assessment strategies. Activities are under way to set the performance levels for each proficiency and to develop the elements of the assessment system. Issues related to the rationale for changing the admissions requirements in Oregon are reviewed. These generally relate to the relevance of high school preparation for college work and the prediction of academic success in college. The PASS project still has significant issues to address in the areas of assessment, articulation, funding, equity and access, and still must deal with political and educational reform issues. Formative evaluation has begun in the original 12 project schools. Preliminary results with regard to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and collaboration are generally favorable, although they reveal the amount of work required to make PASS a functioning system statewide. (Contains five graphs and one table.) (SLD)

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ED 408 316

Oregon's Proficiency-based Admission Standards System (PASS) Project*

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Section 1: Historical and Political Context of PASS

Proficiency-based admissions in Oregon came into being primarily as a response to reform legislation aimed at high schools. Legislation passed in 1991 mandated two performance-based certificates, the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) and the Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM). These certificates were to be achieved around ages 16 and 18 respectively, and were to be benchmarked to "world-class standards." Oregon was to have the best-educated students in the nation and the best-prepared workforce in the world.

The CIM and CAM were to be awarded based on performance, not grades and credits. Students would be awarded them only when they met specified standards, not merely after spending a designated amount of time in school. This meant students would be applying to college with new and unfamiliar transcripts. It also meant these students might have been prepared in fundamentally different ways than current applicants.

The CIM was a general education certificate, and the CAM focused on school-to-work transition and career preparation. Neither specifically addressed college preparation or admission. The legislation left up in the air many basic issues regarding how high schools and colleges would relate to one another. Higher education officials and faculty members were suspicious of the CAM in particular, and viewed school reform at best as well-intentioned but impractical attempts at social engineering. The fact that the legislation made no mention of higher education or its role did not help these perceptions.

The Oregon State System of Higher Education (OSSHE) was obliged to develop its own set of standards as a way to be able to communicate its expectations in the same performance-based language as the CIM and CAM. Oregon's seven baccalaureate-granting institutions are controlled by one governing board, the State Board of Higher Education, which sets admission standards system-wide.

The State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) had been developing better communication with the K-12/community college State Board of Education (SBE) as a result of an executive order from the Governor mandating regular joint meetings. The SBHE and the SBE met in July, 1993 to discuss how students would move from one system based on performance to one based on credits and grades. They agreed that the higher education system would provide the K-12 system a list of the knowledge and skills needed for college entry. Such a list would facilitate the "seamless" transition between systems for students.

Seamlessness was another important theme in the state during the early 1990s. Legislators and educators alike envisioned a continuous system of learning from preschool to postgraduate. Performance standards would be the glue that bound the systems together.

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* Dan Underwood, Diana Oxley, and Lynde Paule contributed to this paper

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The two boards of education were particularly sensitive to the call for a seamless system due to the passage in 1991 of a property tax limitation effort that effectively shifted the burden of funding K-12 education from local school districts to the state. The Legislature exercised a new-found authority to change education policy in ways that it did not before fiscal responsibility was moved to the state level. They were interested in linking the systems and began the process through the standards-based certificates.

Section 2: Structure of PASS

The Proficiency-based Admission Standards System (PASS) has a number of key components. The heart of the system is a clearly-specified description of required knowledge and skills. This description is organized into increasing levels of details, beginning with the areas of proficiency.

There are six content areas that form the heart of the system. These are supplemented by nine process areas. The six content areas are based on disciplinary knowledge in mathematics, science, social sciences, foreign languages, humanities and literature, and fine and performing arts. In addition, students must apply intellectual and cognitive skills from nine areas as they learn material in the six content areas. The nine process areas are: reading, writing, communication competence (speaking, listening), problem solving, critical thinking, systems thinking, technology as a learning tool, teamwork, quality work.

All of the content and process areas have extended definitions which explain the boundaries of the area and help signal the key skills that are developed in each area. The content areas have more detailed specification in the form of proficiencies. The number of proficiencies varies from 5 to 11, with a total of 44 among the 6 content areas. Each proficiency is accompanied by a series of indicators to signal more clearly the knowledge and skills students will be expected to master. These proficiencies and indicators have the nine process areas integrated into them.

More than 60 national and state curriculum reports were analyzed to determine the emerging expectations for American students. The educational systems of other countries were examined and, where possible, their standards were analyzed as well.

The results of these analyses were reviewed by a task force of faculty members from Oregon institutions of higher education and educators from high schools and community colleges. Their comments and recommendations, in combination with the analysis of the reports, served as the basis for writing extended definitions and proficiencies. A subsequent task force drafted proficiency indicators.

Assessment system

Three basic assessment strategies will be utilized.

1. *Criterion-referenced tests.* Criterion-referenced tests will provide information on content knowledge. These tests will often be the same ones required for CIMs and CAMs, allowing teachers and students to use this information twice.
2. *Common Assessment Tasks (CATs).* CATs will assess cognitively complex proficiencies. These tasks will be developed at the state level by trained Oregon educators, university faculty, and evaluators, or purchased from other organizations that have created and field tested such tasks. The CATs will be scored by teachers trained to scoring criteria that will be common statewide. Often, teachers will not score their own students' work.
3. *Teacher verifications.* Teachers will certify student performance on those proficiencies best judged in the classroom. Teachers will be provided scoring standards and examples of acceptable student work for each proficiency they score, and will also identify the means by which they reach their determination.

Reporting system

Student performance will be reported in terms of scores on a 1 to 5 scale for each proficiency. Scores will be summarized to create a proficiency average. Additionally, plans are under way to develop the capacity for students to attach electronically examples of work illustrating their mastery of particular proficiencies. The examples will be linked to the appropriate proficiency or proficiencies, allowing more in-depth information about a student's knowledge when required to make an admission (or placement) decision.

Oregon students going out of state would have their proficiency average along with a description of the required performance level for each of their scores. Out-of-state schools will be provided "translations" indicating how the proficiencies translate into traditional courses, but will also be encouraged to use the proficiency-based system without translation in those states where PASS is currently working to create models of how to use a proficiency-based transcript.

Current development activities

Activities are underway to set the performance levels for each proficiency and to create the required elements of the assessment system. Much of this work is being done in coordination with the Oregon Department of Education as it develops the content standards and assessments for the CIM and CAM. The goal is to produce one assessment system that can be adapted to the needs of the certificates and of higher education admission. Proficiency-based admissions will be fully implemented beginning with students accepted for admission fall, 2001. In the interim, schools can use various combinations of proficiencies and Carnegie units if they receive permission from OSSHE.

PASS has received four grants, three federal and one private, that enable it to include high schools directly as partners in all development activities. Currently, 20 Oregon high schools are participating in identifying performance levels for each proficiency and securing examples of student work that would meet acceptable performance levels on each criteria. These high schools are each linked to an OSSHE institution and a community college. These "partnerships" create a vehicle for co-development of proficiency-based admissions.

Section 3: Rationale and Goals for Change in Admissions

The primary impetus for changing admission was legislation that changed secondary school requirements. However, once OSSHE undertook to develop proficiency standards, it became clear that there were a number of reasons to examine new models for admission. The following reasons were among those that motivated the adoption of proficiency-based admissions:

As the state limited property taxes and moved K-12 funding more to the state level, it began to decrease funding for higher education. This began gradually, and accelerated through the 1990s. The net effect was a cut of approximately 40 percent in state support to higher education over a five year period. Legislators called for "increased productivity" from the state's colleges and universities. This was translated to mean more hours for faculty in front of classes and more students in each classroom.

Cuts of this magnitude cannot be borne within the system without change. While no one in Oregon recommends this as a means to stimulate systems change, it did have the effect of expanding the range of options faculty and administration were willing to entertain to cope with the cuts.

In this context, proficiency-based admissions seemed more attractive, since such a system could result in increased productivity by having better-prepared students move

through the system more rapidly. The net effect would be increased productivity; more students educated by the same number of faculty.

Proficiency-based admissions promised help with several other nagging problems. OSSHE campuses, like their equivalents in other states, admitted many students who had to begin their college studies in remedial courses. OSSHE rates were not exceptionally high (approximately 25 percent in writing, 40 percent in math), but did drive productivity and standards down as students took longer and longer to achieve the baccalaureate.

Similarly, completion rates, the proportion of students receiving a degree in six years, varied between 23 percent and 54 percent. Such rates are common among state-supported schools nationally, but came under increasing scrutiny in a tight fiscal environment. Why admit students who could not or did not complete their studies? Why not develop admissions methods that selected students likely to take advantage of a state-assisted education to receive a degree in four years?

One other hidden effect of current admission procedures was that the freshman curriculum tended to reteach large amounts of the high school curriculum, since college faculty could not be certain what their students knew and didn't know. Such practices were self defeating in many ways, but most significant because they tended to lower students' perceptions of the difficulty of the college program. Such perceptions affected their subsequent effort.

The practice of reteaching the high school curriculum was also difficult to explain to legislators. Why was the state paying for a high school education, then paying once again to reteach essentially the same things to those students who were supposed to be the best-prepared?

Current admission practices suffered from another problem: grade inflation. Requirements to be accepted into the University of Oregon had increased from 2.0 in the 1960s to 3.0 in the 1990s. Student performance on nationally-normed tests such as the SAT remained relatively constant during this period. Students with significantly higher GPAs did not seem to know any more when compared with their peers nationally.

The time-honored method of reviewing each high school's courses and approving college preparation based on course titles did little to control content or quality of the courses, and even less to create consistency of teacher grading within those courses. The approved course list did not communicate to teachers and students what it is they needed to be doing within those classes to prepare for college. The proficiencies higher education would identify for admission would communicate clearly and unambiguously what students needed to be able to know and do to succeed in college, something course titles alone could not do. Having the same proficiencies in place statewide allowed teachers to design learning experiences that prepared students for college more directly and appropriately.

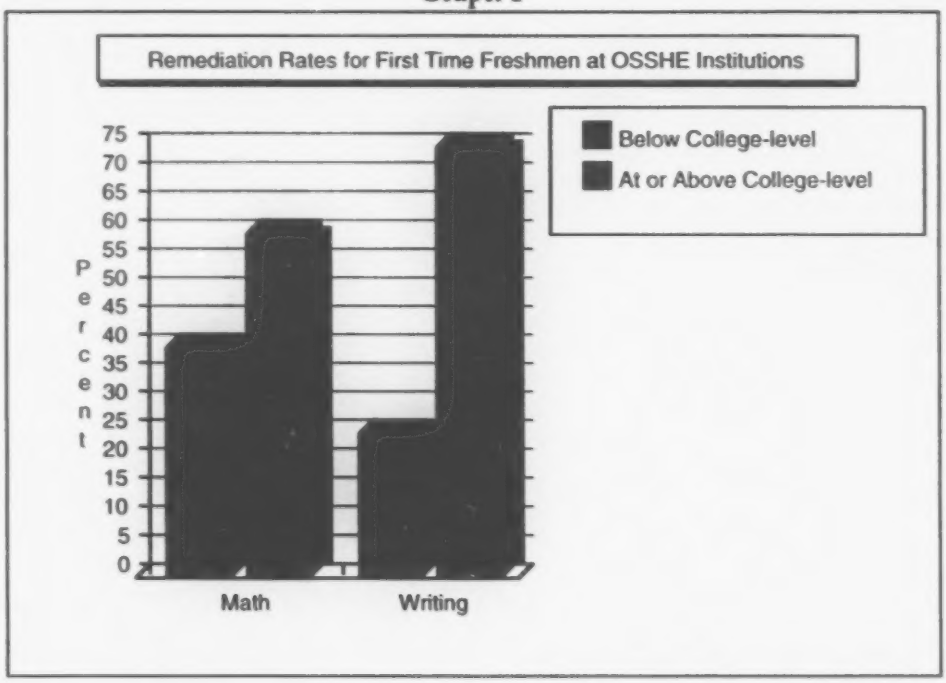
If Oregon high schools were going to change the way they educated and assessed students, colleges would have to be ready. Many high schools had already begun developing new curricula for the CIM and CAM. The curricula tended to be more integrated and applied. Students would work in teams on projects that had real-world applications. They would be assessed via demonstration, exhibition, or portfolio. They would not necessarily spend required amounts of time in class, since much of the work required would be done independently outside of classs. The Carnegie unit would not capture these integrated experiences very well. A proficiency-based model of admission would allow the two systems to talk with one another using a common language, the language of performance, not the language of time.

The remainder of this section examines in turn some of the issues raised earlier in this section relative to the rationale for changing admissions criteria. Each subsection presents a summary of research conducted by the PASS Project on topics that bear on the value, validity, and effects of current grade-based methods of admission.

Increased Rates of Remediation in Writing and Mathematics among College Freshmen*

Despite many past efforts undertaken by secondary education to improve student readiness for college-level coursework in math and writing, remedial education is an increasingly significant issue facing higher education administrators. The rates at which first-time freshmen require some remedial education is alarmingly high at most of the institutions of higher education in the US. The Oregon State System of Higher Education (OSSHE) is no exception—nearly 40% of all first-time freshmen admitted as fully qualified students require remedial education in math, and nearly 25% require some remedial education in writing (see Graph 1 below). Current college admissions policies are resulting in large numbers of "qualified" admitted students in need of remedial education, and may compel institutions to reconsider current admission practices. Although it is not always immediately clear, post-secondary remedial education has many negative effects on both students and the institutions. The purpose of this section is to present some of the negative effects of remedial education, particularly in light of the increasing levels or remediation required.

Graph 1



Remedial education is typically viewed in the context of the academic "readiness" of first-time freshmen students for first-level college coursework in math and writing. First-time freshmen at an OSSHE institution are deemed in need of remedial education if they are unable to qualify for placement in College Algebra or above, or in Writing 121 or above.

Regarding math, OSSHE institutions generally assess a student's readiness by requiring a short math test. As the graph above displays, about 40% of the current first-time

* This subsection first appeared in the PASS Project Newsletter.

freshmen in OSSHE institutions do not place in first-level college math (College Algebra). Furthermore, although not as substantial as with math, many first-time OSSHE freshmen enter the system inadequately prepared for college-level writing as well. About 25% of the first time freshmen in OSSHE do not score high enough on placement exams to qualify for Writing 121. The long-standing tool used by OSSHE institutions for placement in college-level writing is the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE), with a score of 37 or 38 usually being the cutoff for admission to Writing 121.

So, what do these levels of remediation mean to students and institutions in OSSHE? "Essentially, it means that remedial education impinges upon both the student and the university," says Jim Buch, Vice President for Student Academic Affairs at the University of Oregon. "The assumption is that students who perform at satisfactory levels in high school courses and on standardized tests will be prepared for first-level college coursework, but many times, they aren't." This, he suggests, results in the students paying extra money for remedial courses, and puts a university in the difficult position of having to develop a means for helping students overcome their inadequate preparation.

Remedial education can be a very expensive undertaking. For students who do not place in first-level college coursework, the effects of engaging in remedial education can be substantial. The vast majority of remedial education activity is undertaken at extra costs to the participating students, and more often than not, remedial coursework does not carry regular college credit (credit that does not satisfy graduation requirements). Although most OSSHE institutions do offer some remedial courses, the primary sources of remedial education continue to be community colleges and continuing education courses. For students, the extra costs associated with taking remedial coursework at community colleges or in continuing education programs can be significant, and it is estimated that OSSHE students spend at least $300,000 per year on remedial math education alone. When comparable figures are added for remedial writing coursework, it is clear that remedial education has a significant financial impact on ill-prepared students. It is important to re-emphasize that much of this money is spent on coursework that will not be applied toward OSSHE graduation requirements.

In addition to the money that students spend on remedial education, Gary Christensen, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Services for OSSHE says that unprepared students may suffer a more subtle negative effect of remedial education. What is often overlooked, Christensen says, is "the effect that remedial education has on a student's academic and career choices." Most students entering OSSHE hope to complete their programs within four years. But if, for example, a student requires a full year of remedial education in math, the student may be limited to academic programs that do not emphasize math related skills. "It's sometimes difficult for students to catch-up if they've required substantial remedial coursework," Christensen says, "and this may have long-term effects on the student because it limits both their academic and career choices."

Students aren't the only stakeholders to suffer the negative effects of remedial education. Both OSSHE as a whole, and the individual institutions within the system feel the burden of devoting resources to remedial education. Although, remedial coursework is provided through community colleges and continuing education courses, most OSSHE institutions offer limited regularly funded remedial coursework that may be applied to graduation requirements because of the demand for remedial courses in higher education. And in these days of shrinking institutional budgets, remedial course offerings are especially costly to an institution. For instance, in 1990-91 OSSHE institutions spent approximately $100,000 on instruction costs alone for regularly funded remedial writing courses. When this is added to the more expensive remediation costs associated with the regularly funded remedial math courses, it becomes clear that colleges and universities are

spending a great deal of money on teaching the same skills that are generally taught in high schools.

As with unprepared students, the effects of remedial education on an institution of higher education may be subtle, yet significant. Large numbers of unprepared students limit an institution's ability to develop and advance their academic programs. Because many students aren't ready for first-level college coursework, programs and departments are sometimes forced to adjust their curriculums accordingly. And because of the corollary need for institutions to offer some remedial education, institutions are often limited in their ability to develop the type of curricula and programs that they would like to offer. The net result is that remedial education has a far reaching, and very broad negative effect on the entire OSSHE community.

It is clear that not every student entering OSSHE can be adequately prepared for college level coursework, and that higher education should have some role in remedial education. It is equally clear, however, that keeping remediation rates as low as possible serves the best interests of both the students and the institutions. Generally speaking, placement in College Algebra and Writing 121 does not pose an unrealistic standard for students who have successfully completed a high school curriculum. However, across the country there continues to be a large number of first-time freshmen students who require some remediation in math and writing. Remediation rates continue to be a concern for higher education administrators and faculty, resulting in a growing importance placed upon the need to reconsider college admissions in light of the lack of readiness of students for post-secondary education.

In the next section, we discuss why recent trends in high school grade point averages may also cause concern for higher education administrators and faculty.

The Inflation of High School Grade Point Averages*

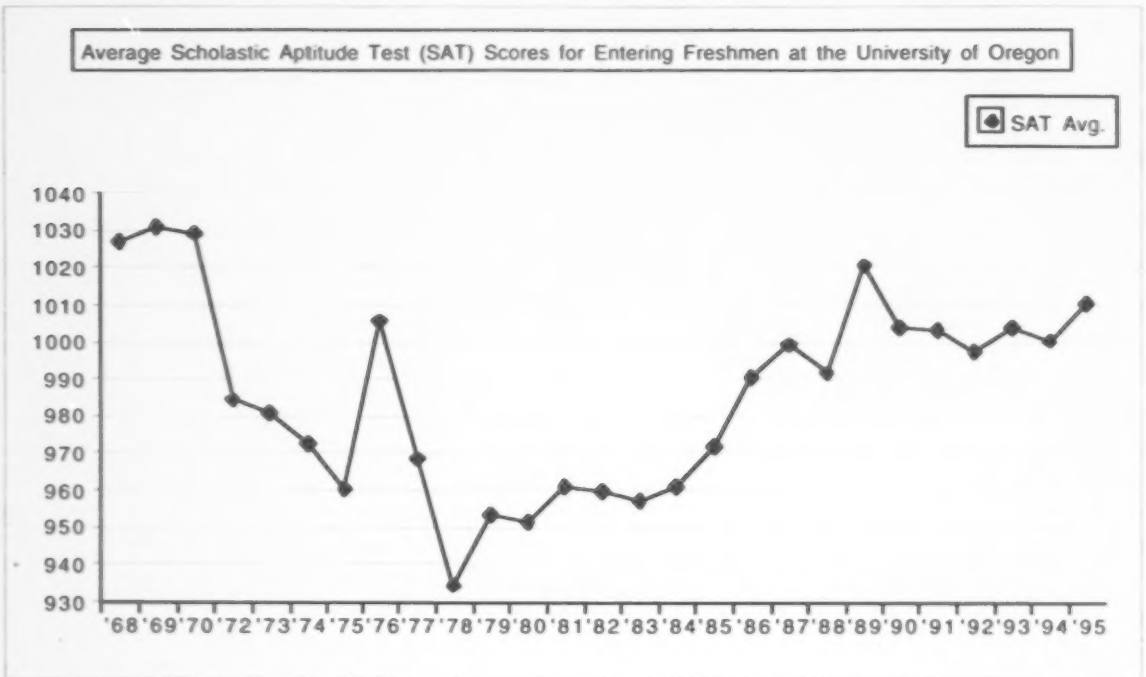
For those associated with college admissions, high school grade point averages (GPAs) have long been considered one of the strongest indicators of college readiness. But does this conventional wisdom still hold true, particularly in light of much recent rhetoric concerning so-called "grade inflation?" In this subsection, we consider just how reliable the grade point average is as an indicator of college readiness. To do this, we compare GPA with SAT scores over the past three decades.

Although SAT scores have their own problems, they do represent a stable, external measure of performance that is explicitly related to college readiness. By comparing the GPAs and SAT scores of incoming freshmen over the period 1968-1995, we can ascertain the relationship between the teacher-determined grade and the nationally-normed SAT score. If grades are reliable, we should expect to see them move roughly in tandem with SAT scores; when one increases, so should the other; they should at least trend in the same direction. If there is little relationship, we should be concerned about what a GPA is measuring.

The University of Oregon has used high school GPAs and SATs as a basis for admissions decisions since the mid-1960s. The data relating to average GPAs and SATs of entering freshmen have been maintained by the UO Office of the Registrar since 1968. Graph 2 (below) displays the average SAT scores for freshmen classes entering the University between fall 1968 and fall 1995. As Graph 2 shows, the average SAT scores of freshmen have dropped from 1026.9 in 1968, to 1010.7 in 1995. In particular, SAT scores dropped dramatically in the 1970s.

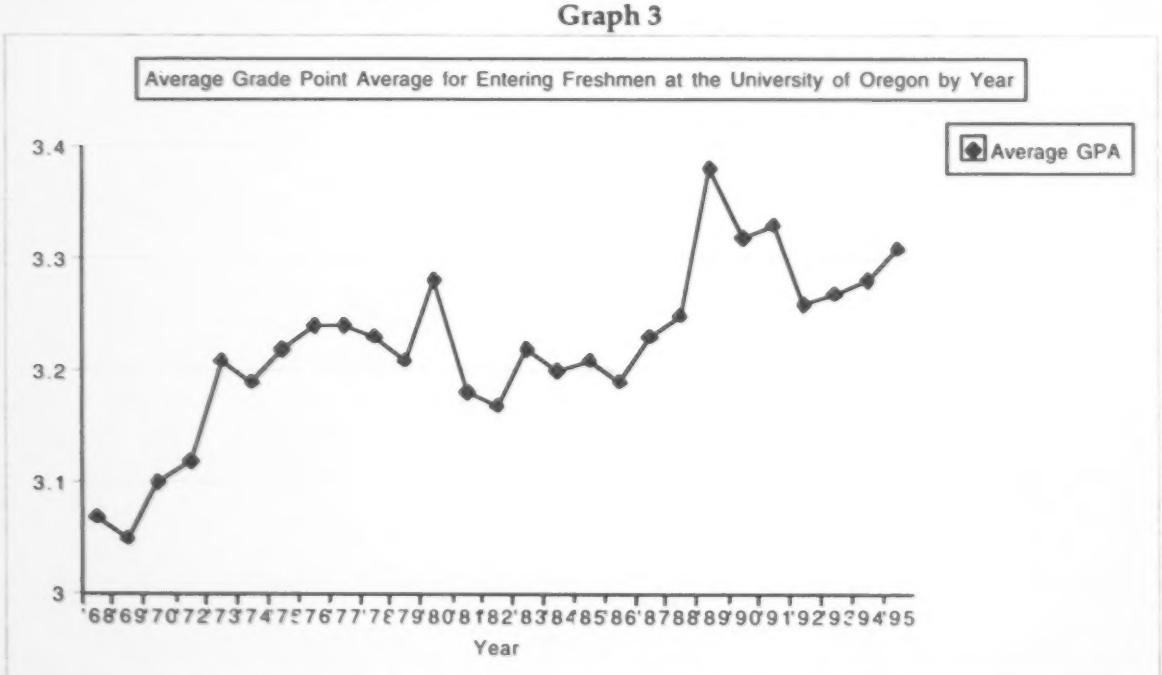
Graph 2

* This subsection first appeared in the PASS Project Newsletter and has been subsequently adapted.



Conversely, Graph 3 (below) shows the general trend of increasing average GPAs for UO freshmen. The freshmen class of 1968 had an average GPA of 3.07, and by 1995 it had increased to 3.31. Read together, Graphs 2 and 3 do not show a strong, consistent, or predictable relationship between the trend in SAT scores and high school GPA. In fact, the correlation is -.07, statistically not significant. The two measures have moved relatively independent of one another over time and when considered by cohort. This is not the usual way in which this relationship is examined.

Graph 3



The second question this trend raises is perhaps more disturbing. If GPA has increased 1/3 of a point over a 25 year period, how long will it be until GPA reaches a point of compression that renders it totally useless as a discriminator? If the average approaches 3.5, as it soon will if current trends continue, how can admission officers make intelligent decisions regarding who should be admitted? They may find themselves with much in common with gymnastic meet judges, who have had to resort to scores with three places to the right of the decimal point to differentiate athletes, all of whom score between 9 and 10 on a ten-point scale. This problem is only exacerbated by the predicted increase in demand over the next ten years for entry into Oregon's seven public colleges and universities.

PASS is designed to provide consistent standards statewide that eliminate grade inflation. Student work is scored against common criteria. Random review of teacher scoring, called "validation," helps ensure high reliability. At the same time, PASS reduces reliance on external tests such as the SAT, which, by design, teachers are not supposed to prepare students to take. PASS lets teachers and students teach and learn what is necessary for entry into and success in college. PASS assessments illustrate the types of skills needed to do college-level work successfully. PASS standards inform teachers how to score student work against consistent standards. The net effect is a "recentering" of the GPA against consistent standards and an increase in both its reliability and validity as a tool for determining college readiness. We move from "Grade Point Average" to "Proficiency Average."

Similar to high school grades, college freshman grades have inflated over time. The next section presents some troubling data regarding the meaningfulness of first-year college grades as true indicators of college readiness.

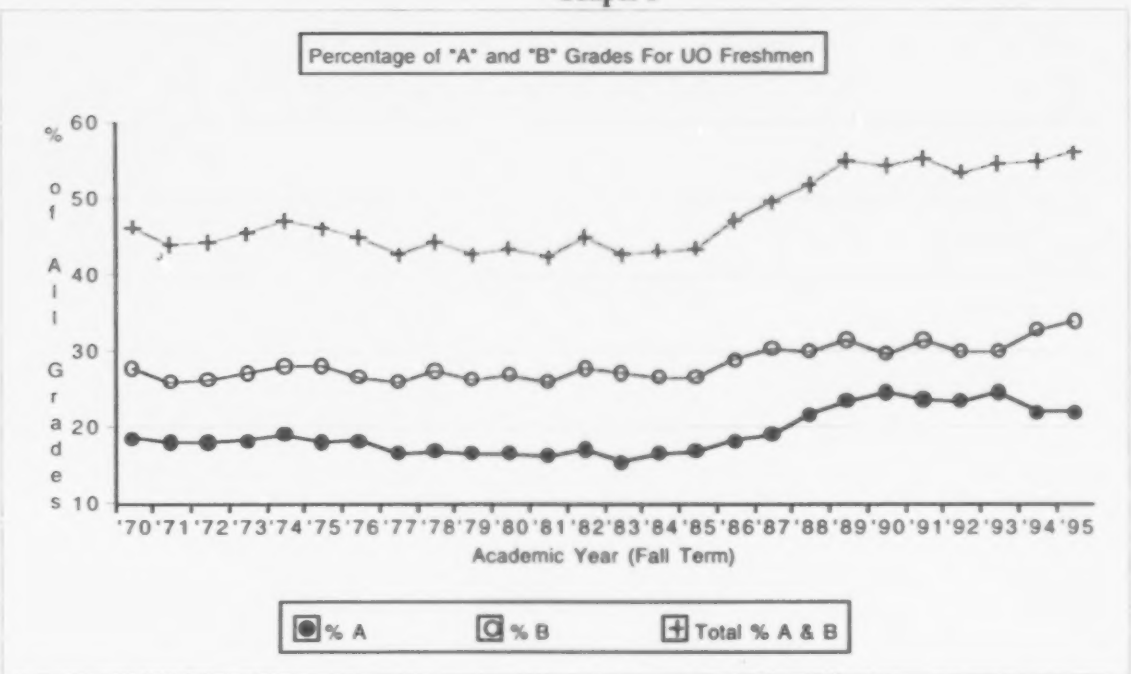
The Inflation of College Freshmen Grades*

As with high school grade point averages (GPAs), a predominant assumption among educators is that college freshmen grades are strong evidence of college readiness. This subsection questions the validity of that assumption by exploring the data available for University of Oregon freshmen over the past 25 years.

Are college freshmen grades reliable indicators of student readiness for college-level work? At first glance most would probably answer "yes." After all, if college freshmen perform well in their first college courses, this must mean they were ready for college-level work. The answer may not be that simple. Graph 4, below, shows the percentage of "A" and "B" grades given to freshmen at the University of Oregon during fall terms from 1970 through 1995 for all first-term, first-year courses has increased substantially over the past 26 years, from 44% in 1970 to 56% in 1995, a 27% increase overall.

* This subsection first appeared in the PASS Project Newsletter and has been subsequently adapted.

Graph 4


Percentage of "A" and "B" Grades For UO Freshmen
% of All Grades
60
50
40
30
20
10
'70 '71 '72 '73 '74 '75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95
Academic Year (Fall Term)
% A
% B
Total % A & B

During this period SAT scores declined, then gradually increased to reach a level slightly below the 1970 freshmen (see Graph 2, above). In other words, students whose SAT scores were slightly lower than their peers' 25 years earlier at the University of Oregon were receiving A's and B's at almost a 30% greater rate. At the same time, students in all seven institutions in the Oregon State System of Higher Education were requiring remediation at a rate of approximately 25% in writing (for those who chose to take writing) and 40% in mathematics (for those who chose to take mathematics) (see Graph 1, above).

Because freshmen grades have actually increased during a period when UO freshmen do not show any improvements when compared to national populations, we must question the reliability of first-year college freshmen grades as indicators of student readiness for college level work. First-year freshmen grades may not be particularly reliable indicators of student readiness and achievement for a variety of reasons, the most important of which is that these courses may be reteaching the high school curriculum (discussed in the next section). But whatever its causes may be, the inflation of college freshmen grades seems to be eroding their value as indicators of student readiness.

It appears that neither college freshmen grades nor high school GPAs really are fully valid data points to serve as the correlates upon which we base the notion of "predictive validity." As long as the assumption is made that a correlation between high school GPA and freshman grades validates our admission procedures, colleges will not be able to design a college program that can assume much about what incoming students actually know. This leads to inefficiency, and worse, complacency and cynicism as students are retaught the same things they just learned in high school (albeit perhaps at an accelerated rate) and college instructors continually bemoan the poor preparation of each year's crop of freshmen.

The next subsection discusses the overlap, or redundancy, between high school and college level courses that has been alluded to above. Similar to our previous findings, the redundancy between high school and college level courses raises questions regarding the true college readiness of many students.

Redundancy in High School and College Level Coursework

So far we have discussed the limitations of freshmen college grades as reliable indicators of student readiness for college level course work. College freshmen grades at the University of Oregon (UO), for example, have risen substantially over the past 25 years, despite the fluctuating average SAT scores for freshmen entering the UO over the same time period. These trends tell us is that the link between college freshmen grades and actual student knowledge, skills, and abilities (measured by standardized test scores) is not terribly strong—but they don't tell us why. In this section we explore one possible cause for the decreasing reliability of college freshmen grades as indicators of student readiness: the redundancy in course content between high school and freshmen level courses.

Part of the rise in college freshmen grades may be attributed to the redundancy, or "overlap," between the content of upper level high school coursework and college freshmen level coursework. If college freshmen are simply reviewing much of the material from their high school courses, we would expect freshmen grades to be relatively high, despite declining average SAT scores. To determine the levels of redundancy between what is taught and learned at high school and what is taught and learned in college freshmen courses, syllabi and course descriptions from four of the most popular college freshmen courses were compared to similar high school courses. The courses compared were: College Composition I (Writing 121), College Algebra (Math 111), Introductory Biology (Biology 101), and First-year Spanish (Spanish 101). All of the information used for the comparison came from an Oregon State System of Higher Education institution (OSSHE), and from a large Oregon high school.

Although the levels of redundancy vary somewhat by course, generally, there is substantial overlap between the college level and high school level course contents. For example, as Table 1 displays (below), the College Composition course (Writing 121) seeks to develop students' critical writing skills, with an emphasis on argumentation, persuasion, reason, and rationale. Further, College Composition develops synthesis skills around the course readings, requiring that students develop a thesis and support it with relevant course literature. Finally, College Composition emphasizes process: students are expected to edit and revise their work, and to refine grammar, usage, and punctuation in their essays.

Similarly, high school AP English focuses on many of the same concepts stressed in College Composition, including: critical writing skills such as argument, persuasion, rationale, and thesis development. Moreover, high school AP English targets the same synthesizing skills emphasized in College Composition, including: applying course readings in support of a student developed thesis, as well as comparing and contrasting course literature. Finally, like College Composition, high school AP English is anchored in the writing process. Students are expected to rewrite their assignments, emphasizing grammar, syntax, punctuation and style.

Table 1

	High School Course Content	College Freshmen Course Content
Composition	•Course emphasis -critical writing skills: argument, persuasion, rationale, thesis development. -creative writing deriving from readings. -process: revisions/rewrites, editing, grammar, self-criticism, usage, punctuation. •Expected performance: 2 essays, 4 shorter papers.	•Course emphasis -critical writing skills: reason, persuasive argumentation, synthesis of ideas, thesis development. -combine reading and writing as forum of communication. -process: revisions/editing, self-criticism, grammar, style. •Expected performance: four essays (3 subject related, 1 reflective).
Algebra	•Pre-calculus emphasis -graphing, polynomial functions, rational functions, exponential functions, logarithms. •Expected performance: weekly quizzes, final.	•Pre-calculus emphasis -graph sketching, functions, linear/nonlinear, exponential functions, logarithms. •Expected performance: weekly exams/worksheets, midterm, final.
Biology	•Introduction to biology emphasis. -genetics, cell structure, mitosis, protein synthesis, photosynthesis, meiosis. •Expected performance: journal, labs, paper, quizzes, final.	•Introduction to biology emphasis -genetics, biological kingdoms, cell structure, mitosis, scientific methods, protein synthesis, photosynthesis, meiosis, sex linkage/genetics/polygenic inheritance. •Expected Performance: weekly labs/workshops, quizzes, papers, midterm, final.
Spanish Language	•Introductory course -speaking, reading, writing, some cultural studies. -basic grammar, usage (feminine, masculine), pronunciation, vocabulary. •Expected performance: workbooks, quizzes, paper, oral exams.	•Introductory course -speaking, reading, writing, some cultural studies. -basic grammar, usage (feminine, masculine), syntax, pronunciation, vocabulary. •Expected performance: written exams, quizzes, labs, oral exams.

Other courses shared similar, or even greater levels of redundancy than found in Composition. For example, College Algebra covers virtually the same course content as the high school Algebra II course, including: functions, graphing, polynomials, and equations and inequalities. Similarly, college and high school introductory Spanish language courses are virtually indistinguishable, each focusing on basic elements of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Additionally, although college level introductory biology does add some content to high school science courses, much of what is covered at the college level will be review for many freshmen students, including: cell structure, mitosis, basic proteins, photosynthesis, and meiosis. In sum, our content analysis of college and high school course syllabi exposed substantial redundancy in the levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities

expected of high school and college freshmen students. In other words, college freshmen aren't expected to know or do much more than they did as high school juniors and seniors.

So, what's the problem with the redundancy between high school and college level coursework? At first glance, the knowledge and skills taught at both levels appear important enough to warrant some overlap, particularly if the college level coursework adds some additional material to what students learned in high school. But our content analysis of high school and college level course syllabi produced so much redundancy that it is clear that many students in college courses are being taught almost exactly what they were taught in their high school courses, and not surprisingly, are earning good grades. In light of the course redundancy, how well do college freshmen grades indicate student readiness for what should be more rigorous coursework? Not very well, unless as educators, we're satisfied with many of our college freshmen reviewing what the they were taught in high school.

The problem of course redundancy, coupled with the increasing levels of remediation required at OSSHE institutions (discussed above), helps to suggest a weakness in current higher education admission and placement policies. Even college placement exams don't remedy the problem, and as one Teaching Assistant from an OSSHE institution put it, "a lot of what we do will be review for many of our students, but a lot of it will be too much for some students. Even with placement tests, we can't determine how much each student really knows until we get them in here." Better determining "how much each student knows" is at the heart of the dilemma, and is the essential purpose of the PASS project. PASS allows for a more stronger, more accurate assessment of what students' skills and abilities are, and at the same time, provides clearly defined standards and meaningful assessment criteria. In this way, PASS helps to reduce the variance present in each incoming freshman class. In doing so, it provides college instructors better information on student readiness for college level coursework.

Decreasing Value of High School Grade Point Averages as Predictors of College Readiness

We have discussed why, as a result of grade inflation, high school GPAs simply may not provide the same measure of college readiness that they once did. We have also demonstrated that grade inflation and redundancy in course content have undermined the value of freshmen college grades as true measures of what students actually know. In this subsection we continue exploring these issues by examining the relationship of high school GPA and freshman performance from another perspective. Specifically, our research suggests that high school GPAs may accurately predict college readiness only for those students with relatively high and relatively low GPAs; for the vast majority of entering freshmen the GPA is not a highly accurate predictor of freshman year grades.

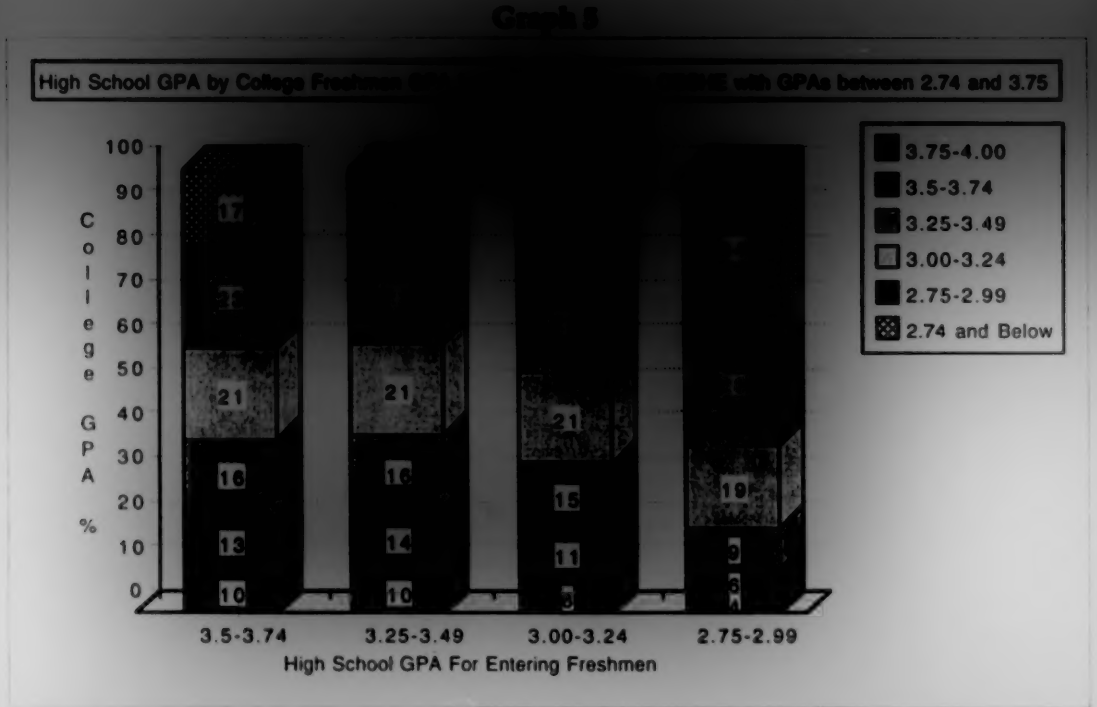
Data on college freshmen who entered an Oregon State System of Higher Education (OSSHE) institution in Fall term, 1994 (the last year for which this data is currently available), were used to explore the assumption that high school GPAs predict freshman performance. If high school GPAs are good predictors of student readiness for freshman-level college work, we would expect to find a reasonably close correlation between high school and college GPAs. In other words, if a student enters college with a very high GPA, we would generally expect that student to do well in the freshman year, particularly given the overlap in curriculum we identified earlier. Likewise, if a student comes to college with a low GPA we might expect that student to have a relatively low college GPA.

We compared the high school GPAs of entering freshmen with their GPAs after the first year of college. Essentially, we "tracked" the performance of all freshmen in the first year of courses at all OSSHE institutions, and compared that performance to their high school grades. What we found was that for the vast majority of freshmen, high school GPAs

are not accurate predictors of how well or poorly they will perform in their first year of college.

In Fall term, 1994, 8,206 freshmen entered OSSHE institutions. Of those freshmen, 1,094 (15%) entered with a high school GPA of between 3.75 and 4.00 (on a 4.00 scale). For these students, high school GPAs did seem to predict college readiness, as nearly 70% of them finished their first year of college with GPAs in the top 15% of all OSSHE freshmen. Similarly, 1,052 (15%) students entered college with high school GPAs of 2.74 or below. Again, for these students high school GPAs seem to correlate closely with college performance, as 74% finished their freshmen year with GPAs in the bottom 15% of all OSSHE freshmen. What this tells us is that if a student enters college with a high school GPA in the top or bottom 15% of the entering class, they are very likely to finish their first year of college in the same stratum. But that only accounts for 30% of the students—what about the other 70% who enter college with high school GPAs somewhere in the middle, between 2.75 and 3.74?

The data show that for this population of students, high school GPAs do not closely correlate with performance in freshman courses. Graph 5, below, sets out the distribution of freshman grades for all OSSHE students who entered with high school GPAs between 2.75 and 3.74 (on a 4.00 scale). The shaded areas in each bar in the graph indicate different strata of freshman GPAs, while the bars indicate different strata of high school GPAs. Thus, the graph shows that for those students entering OSSHE with high school GPAs between 3.50 and 3.74, 10% completed their freshmen year in college with GPAs between 3.75 and 4.00. Similarly, as the graph shows, 10% of all freshmen who entered OSSHE with GPAs between 3.25 and 3.49 finished their first year of college with GPAs of 3.75 or higher.



Graph 5 illustrates the wide range of performance among OSSHE freshmen. If high school GPAs were truly accurate predictors of college readiness, we could reasonably expect to find a correlation between high school and college freshmen performance. For example, 21% of students entering OSSHE with high school GPAs between 3.00 and 3.24 ended their

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freshmen year with college GPAs between 3.00 and 3.24. The same percentage (21%) of OSSHE freshmen entering with high school GPAs of 3.5 to 3.74 completed their freshmen year of college with GPAs between 3.00 and 3.24—the same level of performance as those students entering college with substantially lower high school GPAs. This similarity in college performance is true for both relatively high college GPAs and low college GPAs. For instance, a student entering OSSHE with a high school GPA between 3.50 and 3.74 is just as likely to have a college freshmen GPA between 2.75 and 2.99 as the student who enters with a high school GPA between 3.00 and 3.24.

What these data show is that high school GPAs between 2.75 and 3.74—which includes the vast majority of entering freshmen—don't predict freshman performance very well. It is true that high school GPAs seem to predict the college success of students with GPAs falling into extreme strata (the top and bottom 15%), but we expect that a certain number of students will perform very well or very poorly irrespective of assessment methods.

This subsection presented data from a single year of one state system of higher education. It is not intended to be an exhaustive, longitudinal study of high school GPAs as predictors of college readiness. Rather, the data are presented to provoke dialogue and raise some questions regarding the role of high school GPA in higher education admissions.

The preceding summary of research conducted by the PASS project brings into question many of the traditional assumptions regarding college readiness. Although the data were derived from a single state system (OSSHE), we have no reason to believe that Oregon is a particularly unique context for exploring such issues. At a minimum, we have shown that there are reasons to question some of the assumptions regarding higher education admissions practices. Evidence from a number of areas including high levels of remediation in writing and math required for college freshmen; the inflation of high school grade point averages; the inflation of freshmen grades; redundancy in high school and college level coursework; and the decreasing value of high school grade point averages as predictors of readiness in college level coursework all contribute to this conclusion.

Section 6: Major Issues and Next Steps*

The project still has a significant number of issues to address. These include the following:

Assessment issues

Designing an entirely new assessment system is daunting. However, PASS will draw upon several sources of expertise. The Oregon Department of Education will let contracts for development of criterion-referenced tests that match up with the six PASS content areas. Several national organizations such as New Standards, the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, and American College Testing all are providing assistance or materials for development of Common Assessment Tasks. National consultants with experience in developing performance-based scoring guides are assisting in development of the standards for Teacher Verifications.

The assessment system will be developed in stages to ensure each element meets technical adequacy standards and yields students who demonstrate success in college. An ambitious plan for assessment such as this will work only if the data generated serve several purposes. These data will be used for CIM, CAM, and PASS, and will functionally replace

* This section appeared in an edited form in the document: Responding to School Reform: Higher Education Defines New Roles in Oregon, Wisconsin and Florida, November, 1996, Education Commission of the States, 707-17th St., Suite 200, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427, 303-299-3600.

grades. Teachers will adapt their grading practices to this system, not add it on top of current practices.

Finding the time for all this assessment will require high schools to designate some days as "assessment days," in much the same way they now establish final examination schedules. Common Assessment Tasks, such as a foreign language demonstration, will have the option of being videotaped and sent to another teacher or school for scoring. Some teachers may receive some additional time to conduct scoring.

Articulation issues

Oregon community colleges are very interested in PASS proficiencies. They recognize that if community colleges have no standards, students might tend to avoid PASS standards in high school, then go to the community college with the idea of transferring to a four-year school after a minimal amount of coursework. Community colleges are not interested in becoming a "back door" to higher education, so they are developing their own standards. Although the community college as a whole will remain an open-door institution, specific programs may have entrance requirements. The college transfer program would have as its entrance requirement that students have met PASS proficiencies.

The other natural area of conversation between community colleges and four-year institutions is the transfer program. As OSSHE enters into the next round of renegotiating common course numbering with community colleges, initial attempts at thinking about transfer in terms of proficiency will be initiated. Clearly, it will take some time to move to such a system. However, these early efforts demonstrate a commitment to a more "seamless" educational system where students move between institutions and levels based on proficiencies that are common across institutions.

Funding issues

The development work is currently being funded by three federal grants from the U.S. Department of Education and one grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts. In addition, OSSHE is supporting the project financially. The purposes and amounts of the grants are as follows:

- Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education: To support development of assessments and 20 partnership high schools, $300,000
- Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Fund for Innovation in Education: To support development of training materials, trainers, and to expand the number of partnerships, $1,100,000
- Department of Education, Office of Reform Assistance and Dissemination, Eisenhower Professional Development Federal Activities Program: To develop materials and strategies for teacher education programs to better prepare teachers to teach in standards-based schools, $1,200,000
- The Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: To implement PASS standards in all 12 high schools in the Portland Public Schools, $600,000

This system will have real costs beyond these one-time development expenses. Performance assessments will need to be updated regularly. Scoring materials will have to be printed and distributed widely to teachers. Regular opportunities for training will have to be available.

OSSHE does not intend to fund all the costs high schools would incur to train teachers or to conduct assessments. This is consistent with current policies. However, PASS will provide the materials necessary to operate the system and to train educators in its use. The partnership high schools will serve as models of how to implement PASS. In addition,

a network of Key Trainers is being created, individuals who are skilled in staff development who will be available for schools to employ to train teachers in performance assessment generally and PASS specifically. Many districts are already designating individuals they want included in the Key Trainers pool. PASS will work closely with the Oregon Department of Education as it develops training for the CIM and CAM.

PASS is currently working to establish the likely ongoing costs of the system. An estimate will be prepared for submission to the next session of the Legislature in 1997. Much of the work can be accomplished with participation from school districts and higher education institutions on a contributed basis. This system cannot have a high cost if it is to survive politically. Therefore, creativity and adaptation will be required throughout the development of assessment and training systems.

The intent is to have the same staff in admissions offices. However, these individuals will spend their time in somewhat different ways. They will still receive numerical summaries, the proficiency average, but will have access to more high-quality supplemental data. Such data can be used for placement and advanced standing purposes, as well. Admissions officers will work more closely with faculty to place students more appropriately as they enter college.

Equity and access issues

The goal is not to make college admission harder or easier, but to ensure that students are better prepared to succeed once they are admitted. For this to happen, students will need to be more knowledgeable and skillful academically than they are currently.

However, since this higher level of preparation is being expected of all Oregon applicants, students will have the same relative likelihood of being accepted for admission. PASS will work with high schools to set standards at a level that is higher than current expectations, but achievable by the vast majority of students who currently strive for college admission. These students may have to work more diligently to meet proficiency standards, but those who do so will be just as likely to be admitted as they would under the current system.

Furthermore, requirements for the CIM are designed to result in more students meeting high performance standards. If students are not reaching CIM performance levels, proficiency scores required for admission will be adjusted accordingly.

OSSHE is committed to examine continuously the performance of all students admitted via proficiency demonstrations to determine if some PASS requirements have differential effects on minorities, women, non-native speakers, and students with special learning needs. The system will be thoroughly reviewed and modified on a regular basis, while retaining high standards for all students. OSSHE's goal is to make PASS as equitable as possible.

The broader issue is whether a standards-based system is more equitable than the current one where standards are unstated and largely determined by teachers in isolation. Evidence suggests that students at inner city schools who receive A's perform about as well in college as their counterparts in suburban districts who receive C's. When standards are explicit and assessments consistent, communities can easily compare their students' performance. Furthermore, parents and community activists, armed with proficiencies and samples of student work, can hold educators accountable in much more specific ways than they can now. Standards are not a panacea, but they offer perhaps the best hope for underserved populations to gain access to high-quality educational experiences. At the same time OSSHE will continue efforts to ensure the number of historically underrepresented students increases consistently. A proficiency-based admission system should help increase

the pool of eligible applicants and improve the rate at which they complete a baccalaureate program successfully.

Political issues

School reform exists in a social and political context. PASS benefits because it is a creation of the State Board of Higher Education, not the Legislature. PASS has more flexibility and can adapt to changes in legislation. However, PASS is primarily an attempt to link to education reforms occurring in high school, to guide and support those reforms toward the goal of improve college preparation. The intent is not to control those reforms. PASS, therefore, has a delicate relationship with the CIM and CAM. As they are developed, PASS seeks to influence them but not dominate them. The CIM in particular is a general education certificate that contains areas of study not necessarily appropriate for college admission. PASS does not seek to have the CIM address college preparation only, but to ensure that students who receive CIMs can be college-ready. This leads to an interactive development process where each player moves its performance-based system along another step, then recalibrates it with the work of the other. This may not be a perfect process, but it does represent the most substantive and sustained collaboration between K-12 and higher education systems in memory.

The long-term viability and direction of education reform

Questions remain regarding how enduring education reform efforts generally and the movement toward standards specifically will be. Each wave of reform over the past 15 years has led to a more sustained and intensive look at schooling in America. This level of energy and scrutiny cannot continue indefinitely. However, evidence suggests that the next target for examination and calls for reform will be higher education. Perhaps the efforts being undertaken in Oregon to develop close ties with public schools and to establish standards that result in improved student preparation for college will be a precursor, not just of high school reform, but of a broader call for changes in higher education as well.

Implications for high schools

When PASS is fully implemented high schools will have both the opportunity and challenge to do things differently. Removing subject area requirements based on course title and time opens the door to more variety in instructional formats. Courses need not meet for a specified number of minutes per week, nor do they necessarily have to be designated "college-bound." Students with a variety of educational objectives can learn together, provided assignments and assessments are adapted accordingly, with college-bound students completing PASS-required assessments and meeting PASS proficiency requirements.

A proficiency-based system suggests more students will take the same challenging curriculum, and that instruction, not curriculum, will vary greatly. A core curriculum means more than identifying several classes as core. It means designing a core set of learnings that enable students to reach high standards, in this case standards that lead to college admission.

The trade-off can be that students have less time for electives as stand-alone learning activities. Such activities can often be incorporated into core curriculum to some degree, but if the core is large, students have less time for "electives." However, in a proficiency-based system, colleges make no distinction between required and elective courses. What is important is what the student learns or masters in each class. Traditional electives will be challenged to demonstrate how they link to PASS proficiencies. When students perceive the link, they will be more likely to enroll in them.

The role of counselors can be expected to change. They will do more than count credits and provide letters of recommendation. While their role in a proficiency based system is still emerging, early indications are that they help teachers and students understand better what the standards are and they help them assemble supplementary evidence of learning that accompanies the proficiency transcript. Since the colleges, not the high school, set the standards and requirements, less interpretation is needed from the school. Furthermore, personal references may still be useful, but will be less influential. It's not who you know, but what you know.

High schools may be challenged by service providers who can help prepare students for proficiency demonstrations. Similarly, home schoolers may have an easier time of it if their students no longer need a high school diploma, but can simply meet proficiency requirements and demonstrate this to a credible authority, such as a high school. Competition is not assured, but is perhaps enabled slightly when the standards for college admission are public and accessible.

A proficiency-based system acknowledges learning no matter where it occurs. This means students who learn, say, a foreign language outside of school could demonstrate proficiency and not need to take a class in high school. Such students might accelerate through the high school program, or reach higher levels of achievement while remaining in high school and receive college credit. High schools will have to offer more than simply a diploma and transcript if they are to retain students in a performance-based environment.

Implications for higher education

If high schools are potentially affected by proficiency-based admission, so are colleges and universities. A proficiency-based system can be expected to produce more qualified students who are used to learning and being assessed in somewhat different ways than today's students.

Students will be expected to be at higher levels of preparation in areas such as foreign language and mathematics. This means fewer introductory courses taught by teaching assistants, or, at the least, higher expectations of teaching assistants or more instruction by professors. Some departments may need to redesign their introductory courses and subsequently their sequence based on the proficiencies students have mastered to be admitted.

Many colleges will be challenged if a larger proportion of students proceed to the junior level and seek to enter a master. If colleges are admitting more students who are fully qualified, and more students who may already have received credit for some introductory courses, more students will proceed more rapidly to pursue majors. Most campuses do not have enough spaces in majors to accommodate all students whom they admit as freshmen.

Similarly, colleges should plan to offer less remediation on campus. Students should not receive the message that they need not be proficient once they arrive on campus. If proficiency is certified in high school, students will not engage in remedial courses, nor should they expect to have them available. Some students may legitimately require additional academic support, but colleges in Oregon will no longer assume a large proportion of the student population is incapable of doing college-level work upon admission. The money saved will be reallocated to academic programs in ways that support proficiency-based learning.

One example is credit by demonstration. Students will have more opportunities to meet program requirements by completing a task or performance. Students will pay for these credits at the same rate they would if they were to sit in a classroom. Departments will

develop procedures to score student demonstrations or projects, but will not be called upon to offer as many classes. This approach will succeed because students will be much more comfortable with this approach to demonstrating proficiency, having had similar experiences already in high school. They will be familiar with scoring guides, portfolios, and demonstrations. More students will also earn credits by applying learning in context through field experiences, internships, and projects. These strategies enable increased productivity, as the same number of faculty accommodate more students without increasing faculty workload appreciably.

Colleges and universities can expect to have more discerning students who expect more from their education. Oregon's public colleges and universities are taking steps to accommodate these learners by expanding the number of courses that have extensive student involvement, increasing the use of technology on campus as a way to demonstrate proficiency, and developing new modes of assessment at the "junior rising" and baccalaureate levels. Once proficiencies are accepted as a way to determine admission, the door is open to expecting some proficiency to earn a diploma. OSSHE is anticipating these issues as it institutes proficiency-based admissions.

Oregon has embarked on a journey toward a new and largely unexplored method of student admission. Its goal initially was to be a participant in school reform, rather than a spectator. As the project has developed, higher education realized a proficiency-based approach could serve a number of beneficial purposes beyond the original intent. This multidimensional utility encouraged development work to continue. As work continued, it became clear that OSSHE's work on PASS was beginning to shape high schools' interpretation of school reform. The PASS proficiency system provided needed clarity and definition. The rationale and reward for pursuing the PASS proficiencies was also self-evident. Currently, development work is reaching the challenging point of creating the assessment system and performance levels necessary to specify what will actually be expected of students. More work remains in key areas like transcripting, transferring students across state lines, training teachers, and involving higher education faculty more broadly. At this point PASS is an ambitious "proof of concept" project that is demonstrating it is feasible to admit students based on performance. The more challenging work of scaling up and institutionalizing the system lies ahead.

Section 7: PASS Project Evaluation: Summary of Major Findings

Year 1 Findings

The PASS project evaluation was organized as four strands of research: Formative evaluation of 1) major PASS project activities and 2) Lead Assessors' development and use of PASS curriculum and assessment materials; and documentation of 3) school practices and student values and educational aspirations and 4) teachers' perception of the effects of PASS on student learning and achievement as a forerunner to a summative evaluation of student academic outcomes. Data sources were: Project activity feedback forms, on-site teacher interviews and classroom observations conducted throughout the fall and winter of 1995-96 in the 12 original project schools, and teacher and student surveys administered in June in the same schools. The following subsections contain excerpts from the four areas listed above.

PASS Implementation

- PASS Lead Assessors are using PASS proficiencies in classes that represent a wide range of academic levels, 9th and 10th grade level as well as 11th and 12th grade level courses and general as well as college prep and AP program classes.

- Three quarters or more students who did PASS coursework viewed it very or somewhat favorably across several descriptors. The most frequently endorsed negative view was that the coursework lacked applicability to the real world.
- Lead Assessors particularly math teachers are focusing curriculum content in order to accommodate PASS proficiencies. Future evaluations need to examine closely these curriculum trade-offs.
- The use of PASS proficiencies has led Lead Assessors to assess a wider range of dimensions of student work than they have normally used.
- Lead Assessors reported that their involvement in PASS development work for the most part had not strained their time and energy and on the contrary had enhanced their curricular and assessment strategies and even to some extent their instructional strategies and depth of subject area knowledge.
- Most Lead Assessors collaborated with colleagues both inside and outside their school in developing PASS coursework. Lead Assessors of geographically remote schools especially appreciated the opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues in other PASS partner schools. Future evaluations should address the question of how to increase Lead Assessor utilization of the PASS network since of Lead Assessors have not yet availed themselves of it.
- Teacher interviews, surveys, and focus groups indicated that Lead Assessors' colleagues including administrators often show little interest or fail to provide needed support for PASS implementation. Gaining collegial cooperation is the primary concern of Lead Assessors at this point in their work.
- A majority of teachers not involved in PASS believe PASS is not sufficiently aligned with CIM/CAM, and one-third of Lead Assessors hold the same view.

School Practices and Student Attitudes

- Differences in curricular and instructional practices between higher and lower academic level courses and across different subject areas appear pervasive and pronounced on the basis of both teacher and student self-report and classroom observations. However, classroom observations also revealed that highly innovative practices were in use in those classes where they were not typically found, for example, lower level math classes. Future evaluations should examine closely both whether the differences influence the implementation of PASS and conversely what the effect of PASS implementation is on these differences.
- The college aspirations, work experience, and peer values of students in higher level academic courses differ markedly from students in lower academic courses. Future evaluations should examine the effect of broadened implementation of PASS on these differences.
- Large percentages of students overall felt their jobs were more enjoyable than school and that attending class and studying were only somewhat (as opposed to very) important. Future evaluations should continue to monitor these attitudes in relation to broadened implementation of PASS.
- Survey responses showed that teachers overall assign grades on the basis of factors that are both consistent with PASS, students' absolute level of achievement, for example, and inconsistent, class attendance, for example. Interestingly, focus group findings pointed out that Lead Assessors are having to overcome students' idea that effort, class

attendance, just turning something in, etc., should count for a great deal. The survey responses suggest that teachers reinforce this attitude through their grading practices.

- Both teacher interviews and surveys indicated that school staff are eliminating remedial courses to heighten standards for achievement overall at the same time that some teachers are exerting pressures to create such courses as the only means to avoid higher failure rates.

PASS Impact on Learning

- Most Lead Assessors felt students' work on PASS proficiencies enhanced their learning in a range of areas. Future evaluations need to collect information that will enlarge understanding of why even small percentages of Lead Assessors felt PASS had a negative effect on student learning.

- Lead Assessors' survey responses indicated that PASS had a more favorable impact on higher achieving students than lower achieving ones. Yet, focus group findings revealed that Lead Assessors felt both groups of students benefited from the more precise specification of learning goals they had accomplished with use of PASS proficiencies. Future evaluations need to continue to monitor the impact of PASS on students who have historically achieved at lower levels.

Very Preliminary Findings from Year 2

Curriculum

- At a general level and for teachers involved in year 2 or 3 of the project, teachers are adapting their curriculum to meet proficiency standards (as opposed to adapting the proficiencies to fit their curriculum [more typical of year 1 participants]). After teachers have determined a match between one or more proficiencies in the class(es) they are teaching, they are using the proficiency to restructure curriculum. This has resulted in covering more material in some areas and covering less in other areas.

- The issue of curriculum coverage concerned some teachers initially as they planned their learning activities for students; however, as students became more involved in the subject matter and more excited about the depth in which they were learning material, teachers' concerns abated.

- The issue of curriculum coverage is of greatest concern for social studies teachers who feel they lack the direction they need to work with the proficiencies. Social studies teachers as a whole are having the greatest difficulty with PASS proficiencies.

Instruction

- For year 2 and 3 participants, instruction has been less directed by the teacher (their role is changing to that of a coach or a facilitator) and more directed by the students. Although there is still a lot of lecturing going on, teachers are also using a greater variety of instructional activities in their classrooms. Many teachers, for example, are developing projects in which students work collaboratively and many teachers are developing and using scoring guides or rubrics for students.

- According to students, projects give students the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired in a way that traditional assignments (i.e., worksheets) do not. Many students say that when their learning is self-directed and they can work on projects to demonstrate what they know, what they have learned will "stick with them for a long time."

- The use of scoring guides has had the most profound influence on students. When used as part of an instructional activity, scoring guides provide clear expectations for students For the first time for many students, they know what they need to do to complete an assignment, specifically what is important to include, how the information needs to be presented, and the criteria that will be used to make a judgment (i.e., grade).
- Teachers, while recognizing the instructional value of scoring guides, say that they do not have adequate time to produce them for all of the learning activities.

Assessment

- Assessment activities are of the greatest concern for the majority of PASS participants. Concerns include having students produce a sufficient body of work, to organizing the logistics and management of the assessment activity (e.g., "blind" evaluations for oral language proficiency), to trusting colleagues to review bodies of work, to using the ratings to make decisions about grades, to recording and reporting assessment results and meeting proficiencies.
- Math teachers are also concerned that there needs to be a test to objectively assess if a student has met a proficiency.
- Despite these concerns, second and third-year teachers are using assessment results to revise their curriculum and instruction.
- As teachers are becoming more confident of the assessment results it is conceivable that they will use assessment activities to frame curriculum and instruction activities.

Collaboration

- Although teachers are the first to acknowledge the value of collaboration in a project like PASS, there is very little collaboration around PASS requirements going on within schools and across schools.
- Many teachers within schools are experiencing frustrations in areas that teachers in other schools have tackled successfully (e.g., using a math proficiency in a "non-math" class such as electrical engineering; developing scoring guides) and information is not being shared.